Mary Kai Nakagawa wrote a three page account of her parents and herself. The story below combines the account with information she gave me as we sat at my kitchen table, here on Ely Road, near Penngrove, in May 1993. Her address is 1590 Goodwin Ave., Penngrove, California, 94951.

My parents were married in Japan, in the state of Hiroshima. They were Kisuke and Tamano Kai. In 1918 they came to the United States. They worked as laborers in the hopfields, and in the apple driers. They pruned apple and prune trees in the orchards, each time in a different location in Sonoma County. There were other Japanese working here, in the same way.

. The farmers provided housing, so there was always a roof over our heads, a kitchen, and a bedroom, though sometimes it was just a lean-to against a big barn. As laborers my parents made three different moves a year, consequently there could be three different schools for the children. It was hard on a child.

I was born in August, 1920, in Sebastopol. When I was ready to go to school, my parents wanted to send me to one school.

They were able to buy property in the name of my sister and myself, to set up an estate of minor daughters. My father signed the checks. Minor children, born here, were citizens. (Their parents, born in Japan, were denied citizenship, at that time).

We moved to Penngrove in October 1926, and I attended Eagle School (now Penngrove) which I found out in later years was a brand new school at the time. I attended the elementary school and the junior high there for nine years.

Mother picked me up every afternoon so that I could help with the eggs. She started driving in 1926. My father suffered a minor accident and was never interested in driving again. Mother was one of the very few Japanese women that drove in that time. We had a Ford Model A.

When I was in high school, I didn't get home on the bus until 5:00 o'clock. We were on the first run in in the morning. We left before eight, and we were on the last bus out. But the eggs were waiting for me to do.

A couple of days a week after school I'd be so hungry I would have to spend a nickel on a hamburger at McAninch's, across from the high school.

The Chicken business was every day of the year. No off days, or holidays. If we went anywhere we had to come home by 4:00 PM at the latest.

I went to one football game my three years in High School.

We had 7.76 acres on Goodwin avenue. There were six or eight Japanese poultry farmers in our immediate area, Elysian and Goodwin Avenue. There were others in the Penngrove area, on the east side; then the Corona area, between Old Adobe and Ely. There were more out in the Skillman area.

Our capacity, in laying hens was around 10,000. I think we were about middle capacity. There were many many other Japanese and Japanese American families who had larger capacity.

We sold our empty sacks to the sack buyer, and fertilizer to the fertilizer buyer. We sold our scrubby chickens to the chicken buyer, whose name was Obert. The money we made paid for our living expenses. Checks from the eggs went into the business account, paying for the feed, the chicks, P.G.and E., and the mortgage.

We sold eggs to Nye and Nissen, Casperson and Sons, and others. We were never members of the Poultry Producers.

We built our house, the present house, in 1940-41

. We had a Sunday School, what we called a Sunday school because we went there on Sunday to be taught to read the Japanese language. It was a building on Ely road next to the railroad track on the West side. It was not a religious center, but a community center. We had New Year's Eve parties there, picnics, and there was a Boy Scout troup. It folded up as a school in the 30's, the kids lost interest.

When the war started it was nothing like "you get out in 24 hours" as it was for the Japanese on Bainbridge Island (in the state of Washington). At first it was only the coast they cleared the Japanese from, and we thought to buy a motor home and go to Yuba City. But then it was said that all Japanese in California were to be evacuated.

Pearl Harbor was in December. We began selling our poultry in April, but others sold before that and weren't treated fairly. Sam Nisson, from whom we bought feed, worked with the business people to get fair prices. He got other ranchers to buy our feed and chickens. Sam said we had to get good renters for our house, and he did. He had power of attorney to act for us, and he put the rent into our bank account. Then after we were gone he rented our chicken houses as well.

Sam Nisson lived in Lakeville, and was the owner of Corona Feed Mill. He helped his Japanese customers.

We left in May, 1942, by train, from the Santa Rosa Depot. Most of the Sonoma, Mendocino and Napa county Japanese, and perhps Marin too, left when we did, half of them on Saturday, the others on Sunday.

All we could take was what we could carry, including bedding. Everything else went into two rooms, one in the house and one in the barn. They were padlocked. When we returned after three years we found the locks still in place. Others were not so lucky.

There were Caucasians living in our houses during the war, so there was no burning of our houses. But the Community Center was burned.

We went to the Merced Fairgrounds. Fall of '42 we were moved inland to Granada, Colorado, close to the Kansas border.

I always took it that we were safe. There was barb wire, and guards up in the towers. We had food, each other, we had movies. I felt safe.

The Army opened "the West coast" {the coastal states} before the end of the war. Sam Nisson, who had kept in touch with us, suggested we return to see our place, before we made up our minds to return. I came, alone, then returned to the camp to tell my parents that we should come home.

I was married in camp, and my husband and I came here a couple of months before my parents came.

We stayed in the poultry business until the early 1950's.

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PLACE Penngrove

DATE June 5 1993

Mary K. Nakagawa
(Interviewee)

(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)